

I'm Not Returning to Google After Maternity Leave, and Here is Why

My Story of Retaliation and Discrimination at Google

[REDACTED]

I'm sharing this statement because I hope it informs needed change in how Google handles discrimination, harassment and retaliation. This is a long read, but the details are important in understanding the often drawn-out, isolating and painful experience of victims of discrimination, harassment and retaliation. Also, if anything similar has happened to you, know that you're not alone.

--- A year and a half ago, after four years of strong performance that included two Superb ratings and several Strongly Exceeds, I was promoted into a position of managing a team of five Googlers. This resulted in my now reporting directly to my director, who had previously shared glowing comments about my work via two prior perf cycles.

Given my increased responsibilities as a manager, my director and I discussed a fast-track towards my going up for a promotion to L6. Our plan was reflected in my director's comments in the following perf cycle, in which she noted my "trending up" in performance.

At one point after my promotion, my director/manager started making inappropriate comments about a member of my team, including that the Googler was likely pregnant again and was overly emotional and hard to work with when pregnant. My manager also discussed this person's likely pregnancy-related mental health struggles and how it's difficult because, "you can't touch employees after they disclose such things."

When it became clear that my manager was encouraging me to manage the member of my staff off of the team, I documented what my boss was saying and reached out to HR to ask for help in navigating the situation. It was shared that others had reported my manager behaving inappropriately and that feedback had already been given to her. I was told my comments might be shared directly with my boss, but not to worry because strong measures are in place at Google to prevent retaliation.

Almost immediately upon my discussions with HR, my manager's demeanor towards me changed, and drastically. I endured months of angry chats and emails, vetoed projects, her ignoring me during in-person encounters, and public shaming. The final blow was finding out my

manager was sharing reputation-damaging remarks with other more senior Googlers not on my PA, and actively interviewing candidates to replace me. We had, had no conversations about my leaving the team.

I reported on several occasions my manager's ongoing retaliation and how it was impacting my health. HR acknowledged they were aware of some of the activities and that such behavior was inappropriate, but stated there was no evidence of retaliation and that a formal investigation consequently wasn't warranted. I was reassured that my manager was being coached. The only support I received as the victim of my manager's abuse was encouragement to take advantage of medical leave.

At this point the stress of the situation started impacting my health to the point I couldn't sleep at night and I was physically ill. I additionally was worried about how the stress was impacting my gestating baby. I needed to remove myself from the abusive environment, and thus accepted a management role on another team.

Upon giving notice that I was leaving my team, I was immediately contacted by my VP who stressed that I'm doing great work and am a coveted member of the team. He asked that I remain on the team, especially given that my manager was transitioning off of the team for reasons he couldn't share. Finally some action had been taken, so I thought! I decided to stay on the team.

Fast forward to over a month later, and my manager was still on the team and her manager scheduled a meeting with me. I was told in that meeting that counter to what I had been told by my VP, my manager was not leaving the team. I was then told that my manager reported I wasn't meeting expectations for my role, and asked what my next steps were.

Clearly I was being encouraged to leave the team, which was confusing given my VP had recently begged me to stay on the team and stressed my stellar performance. I expressed to my manager's manager that I was concerned about having to interview for other jobs while visibility pregnant and worried that teams wouldn't consider me for roles of similar scope and responsibility due to my fast approaching maternity leave.

Expecting continued retaliation from my manager upon switching teams, I emailed HR asking what measures were in place to protect me. I never received a response to the email.

About four and a half months prior to the expected start of my maternity leave, I found another team on a different PA that offered me a management role of lesser responsibility. I had reservations about the decreased scope of the role, but was desperate to leave my current unhealthy work environment and concerned I wouldn't find another management role prior to or coming out of maternity leave.

Although I was introduced via email to my new team as a manager, my new boss confirmed after my start date that I wouldn't absorb my team until after returning from maternity leave for

fear that my maternity leave might "stress the team" and "rock the boat." My new manager repeatedly stated that I was not to tackle any management tasks, and I was excluded from certain management communications and offsites. I initially didn't complain about what was obvious discrimination given I was so damaged from the experience with my former team.

During one conversation in which my new manager brought up meeting with my former manager to sync on my recently released performance review, I did however share that I was deflated because of retaliation and how I was treated by my former boss. My new boss warned that I should let the situation go given the seniority level and influence of my former boss within the smaller Seattle/Kirkland Google community in which we work. Months later, my new boss forwarded an email to her team in which she and my former boss chummily exchanged perf strategies.

A few short weeks after joining my new team, I was diagnosed with a pregnancy-related condition that was life-threatening to both me and my daughter. I started socializing among leads to expect my having to take an earlier than expected leave, and that I was restricted from travel because I needed to be within close proximity to a particular hospital that had the facilities to care for my condition and premature babies.

During one conversation with my new manager in which I reiterated an early leave and upcoming bedrest, she told me that she had just listened to an NPR segment that debunked the benefits of bedrest. She also shared that her doctor had ordered her to take bedrest, but that she ignored the order and worked up until the day before she delivered her son via cesarean section. My manager then emphasized in this same meeting that a management role was no longer guaranteed upon my return from maternity leave, and that she supported my interviewing for other roles at Google.

The first week of the new year, I emailed my manager letting her know I was experiencing concerning symptoms and would be taking the day off and likely starting my leave. A few hours later, she sent me an angry email letting me know I wasn't meeting the expectations of someone at my level, nor meeting the expectations of a manager. This was the first time any such feedback had been shared, and no concern was stated for the status of my health and pregnancy. At this point I was furious about how I was being treated and reported to HR that I was a victim of discrimination. HR confirmed an investigation would start.

I was next hospitalized for three weeks, with my daughter finally being born early via emergency c-section after a series of scary hemorrhages. Not one person from my new team proactively

reached out to see how I was doing while in the hospital or after the birth of my daughter.

Four months after I reported acts of discrimination, I finally heard back from HR with results from their investigation. I was told that my manager did a poor job communicating the scope of my new role, but that there was no evidence of discrimination. It was additionally shared that I was excluded from certain management events because of an administrative error, and that my manager never meant to discourage me from taking early leave. I'm baffled as to how it took four months to come up with such shallow findings.

My investigator emphasized that I shouldn't be concerned with retaliation for sharing my concerns, but then stated I could enroll in free counseling through Google if I needed tips on how to rebuild the relationship with my manager given her awareness of the investigation. I asked for support in switching teams, to which I was sent an email with a link to go/grow. I felt completely unsupported and gaslit. I was alone.

Can you guess what my calibration score was in the next perf cycle that closed while I was four months into maternity leave? Needs Improvement. Given my early maternity leave due to pregnancy-related health issues, attending an encouraged training and conference, and PTO taken in conjunction with Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's, my new team based this off of about six weeks of actual work time.

I stood up for a mother on my team and doing so sent me down a path that destroyed my career trajectory at Google.

[REDACTED]

P.S. - Here's what my direct reports had to say about me in the last perf cycle (October, 2018) in which I had reports while on [REDACTED], prior to moving to [REDACTED].

[REDACTED] excels at creating an inclusive environment for her team, setting a harmonious and productive tone for all of her meetings. She's also an excellent communicator and coach, empowering each of her reports to explore and resolve tough issues through reflection and inquiry. The team has been through significant changes of the past 6 months, and she's navigated the ambiguity and tension with ease. She's proactive about elevating research strategically, including creating forums and channels where none existed (e.g. weekly research updates email to leads to elevate the work and visibility of our team's contributions to core projects). Finally, she leads with vulnerability and models a growth mindset. For example, she takes the time to document and share her learnings internally and externally, so that other can stand on the shoulders of her extensive knowledge and experience. She does all this with

unwavering optimism and energy. We are so lucky to have her and many managers at Google could learn from her approach.

[REDACTED] is a very approachable manager. I appreciate her directly asking how she can best support me during our weekly 1:1s. It makes me feel valued and helps me perform my job better.[REDACTED] also does a great job of connecting her reports with relevant resources, such as another UXR that is working on a similar project, or suggesting classes she think would be useful.

Shows consideration for me as a person - always! She recognizes that work is part of our whole-self and allows our team to bring as much or as little of our personal life into our work persona as we see appropriate. Consideration for me also includes giving hard feedback in a timely manner because it allows for things to be worked on or clarified.Also, excellent at openness around bigger picture things, like sharing strategy.

[REDACTED] is a superb manager. It is hard to pick only 1-2 things that [REDACTED] has done well. [REDACTED] does an excellent job in balancing: she encourages autonomy but always picks the right time to intervene. For foundational research such as the [REDACTED] Messages persona survey and the [REDACTED] digital wellbeing lit review, she trusted that I could scope the project and work with my collaborators to come up with the best plan forward. When I requested, she gave actionable feedback and help me navigate the XFN team (often within a few minutes notice). For example, she did not hesitate to voice her strong concerns to the team in light of the [REDACTED] Privacy Tour study results and she was instrumental in communicating the tension and feedback from research to other functions. Her intervention not only elevated the research impact but also helped set a healthy team dynamic.I appreciate how [REDACTED] gave feedback. When giving feedback on executing research, she often supplemented her points with external articles or her own past examples. When I approached her with organizational challenges, she often asked what I would've done differently or what I would do. This demonstrated the effective leader and mentor she was, because these two-way conversations allowed me to learn through my own initiation. Above all, [REDACTED] cares about me as a person. She was always receptive and empathetic when I approached her with any problems. She put well-being front and center. As a report to her, I feel extremely empowered to make decisions for myself in a way that I can best grow.

[REDACTED] is 100% committed to her growth as a people manager, so I honestly can't think of anything to help her improve beyond what she's already doing. However,

in terms of impact, I would encourage her to document and publish her approach to people management, as I'm certain that other managers, even across functions, would benefit from her unique insights and perspective. She could also perhaps organize and/or participate in panels to discuss the topic of people management to broaden her visibility as an awesome manager.